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News Release

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AMERICAN RED CROSS AND EMERGENCY OFFICIALS URGE CITIZENS TO TAKE LIFESAVING STEPS NOW TO PREPARE FOR HURRICANE SEASON

FREDERICK, MD – Americans are more attuned than ever to the power of hurricanes and severe weather -- the widespread devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the 2005 hurricane season is etched into the nation's collective memory. The beginning of the season brings a single question: "Are my loved ones and I prepared for an unexpected situation?" No matter where one lives -- the return of hurricane season on June 1 is a call to action to check family emergency plans and restock emergency supply kits. The 2007 hurricane season is predicted to be above-average activity. There is no way to know how many hurricanes will make landfall or how much damage they may wreak.

Frederick County Emergency Planning and Management Division Director Jack Markey advises, "Citizens should be aware that tornados, flash-flooding and river flooding -- our most likely natural hazard events to result from a hurricane -- can occur at any time with far less warning than is typically available for a hurricane. The time to prepare is now."

Every family can follow the same basic emergency preparedness strategy, whether in a hurricane-prone area or elsewhere -- get a kit, make a plan and be informed by knowing the types of disasters that can occur in a community.

Advanced warning systems today are better than ever before. They can offer communities time to evacuate potentially affected areas when a storm is imminent. "It's important to remember that just because you were safe last year, it doesn't mean you shouldn't evacuate when told to this year. The time to prepare is now. Create your personal disaster and evacuation plan and make sure you build an emergency supply kit. Knowing what to do in an emergency situation is your best protection," said Judy Peterson, Director of Emergency Services for the Frederick County Chapter of the American Red Cross.

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Assemble an Emergency Supply Kit

Families should gather enough emergency supplies to meet their needs. A portable kit, stored in a sturdy, easy to carry, water resistant container should have enough supplies for three days. The Red Cross also recommends having at least two weeks worth of supplies at home and to keep a smaller kit in the trunk of a car. An emergency supply kit should include:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and ready-to-eat non-perishable foods, such as tuna fish, peanut butter, crackers, canned fruit, juice boxes, etc. Replace stored water and food every six months.
- A battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
- A manual can opener.
- Copies of important documents, including birth certificates, insurance policies and social security cards. Original documents should be secured in a locked box or safety deposit box.
- Extra long-sleeved shirts, long pants and sturdy footwear.
- One blanket or sleeping bag per person.
- A first aid kit, including prescription and non-prescription medicines.
- Emergency tools, including tools to turn off utilities.
- An extra set of home and car keys.
- Cash/credit cards.
- Special items for infant, senior or family members with disabilities.
- An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses, extra batteries for hearing aids.

Prepare a Personal Emergency and Evacuation Plan

The American Red Cross and the Frederick County Division of Emergency Planning and Management urge each and every family to develop a family disaster plan:

- Family members should meet to create a plan, discuss the information gathered and why it is important to prepare for a disaster.
- Show and explain to each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches and how to use a fire extinguisher. Remember, if the gas is shut-off, only a professional can turn it back on.
- Identify ahead of time where each person would go if they are told to evacuate. Choose several different places – a friend's home outside of the affected area, a motel or a shelter.
- Get a good map and be familiar with the community's evacuation routes.
- Listen to local media broadcasts or a weather radio for the latest storm conditions.
- If residents are told to evacuate, do so immediately. Evacuate sooner than alerted if there is a need for additional time.
- In case of evacuation alert, bring the emergency supply kit.
- Make advanced safety preparations for family pets. Be aware that pets may not be allowed in shelters. Contact the Frederick County Animal Control Division at 301-600-1546, humane society or veterinarian for suggestions.
- Ask an out-of-town friend or family member to act as "family contact" for everyone to call in case of separation. Long distance calls are often easier to make after a disaster than local calls.
- Develop several options for re-establishing communication during times of emergency (phone contact, sending e-mail to a distribution list of family members, use of the "Safe and Well" website at www.redcross.org, etc.)

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Emergency officials strongly recommend that individuals and families take preventive measures to ensure their personal safety during a **hurricane watch or warning**:

- Listen to media hurricane progress reports via battery-operated radio or television.
- Get a battery-operated radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
- Check the emergency supply kit, including food, water and clothing.
- Fill vehicles with fuel.
- Bring in outdoor objects such as lawn furniture, toys and garden tools, and anchor objects that cannot be brought inside.
- Secure buildings by covering windows with storm shutters or pre-cut plywood.
- Turn refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting. Open only when absolutely necessary and close quickly.
- Store valuables and personal papers in a waterproof container on the highest level of the home.
- Avoid elevators.

If at home:

- If in a manufactured home, check tie-downs and evacuate as told by local authorities.
- Stay inside, away from windows, skylights and glass doors.
- Do not use open flames, such as candles and kerosene lamps, as a source of light.
- If power is lost, turn off appliances to reduce damage from a power surge when electricity is restored.

Prepare for High Winds

Conduct a home hazard hunt and perimeter search to inspect the home for items that can move, fall, break or cause a fire.

- Make trees more wind resistant by removing diseased and damaged limbs.
- Install hurricane or high-wind shutters on windows or cut plywood to cover windows, and add protection to the outside areas of sliding glass doors.
- Strengthen garage doors and un-reinforced masonry.
- Move or secure lawn furniture, outdoor decorations or ornaments, trashcans, hanging plants and anything else that can be picked up by wind and become a projectile.

Evacuation Plan

If officials indicate evacuation is necessary:

- If time permits, and a home is in an identified surge zone, elevate furniture pieces or move them to a higher floor to protect them from flooding.
- Secure the home by unplugging appliances and turning off electricity and the main water valve.
- Bring the emergency supply kit.
- Take warm protective clothing, blankets, sleeping bags and prescription medicines.
- Tell someone outside of the storm area where family members are going.
- Lock the home and leave immediately.
- Avoid flooded roads and watch for washed-out bridges.

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Families should practice and maintain their emergency plan. Ask questions to make sure family members remember meeting places, phone numbers and safety rules. Conduct drills.

For more information regarding how individuals and families can prepare for emergencies, contact the Frederick County Chapter of the American Red Cross 301-662-5131 or visit www.frederickredcross.org.

Citizens may also contact Acting Director Kathy Forrest, Frederick County Department of Emergency Preparedness, Emergency Planning and Management Division, at 301-600-6679 or via e-mail at kforrest@fredco-md.net.

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